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## Frontier Alabama: Access to 19th Century Textiles, 1818 to 1850

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## Frontier Alabama: Access to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Textiles, 1818 to 1850

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The study of early United States history has all too often concentrated on the growth and development of the Atlantic seaboard looking east to the Atlantic Ocean. Perhaps a more balanced and accurate approach is to view the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as history moving *westward* from the Atlantic seaboard to the Mississippi River (Furstenburg 2008).

Hundreds of thousands of settlers struck with “Alabama Fever” migrated southwest to make a new life when the soil of the eastern seaboard became less and less fertile in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before Alabama gained statehood in 1819, its inhabitants sought to bring civilization as they knew it on the eastern seaboard to the frontier (Rogers, Ward, Atkins, and Flynt 1994).

The stages of the social and economic development of Alabama illustrate F. J. Turner’s Frontier Theory (1893) as well later important theories such Casagrande, Thompson, and Young (1964) and Lewis (1984). A survey and content analysis of Alabama newspapers from 1818 to 1850 show that the successive stages of development of the state were accompanied by the increased importation of textiles, ready-made apparel, and accessories from New York and Europe as well as advertisements for men’s and women’s magazines illustrating the newest trends in apparel. Through the use of National Archive shipping and lading manifests, several

shipments of textiles were traced from point of manufacture in Manchester, England, to the port of Mobile, Alabama.

. From the earliest period of European settlement of North America, textiles played an important role in the economic development of the America (Ulrich 1991). Preliminary research and discussion with history and textile scholars indicate that a body of research addressing this topic does not exist. Alabama history as well as the general study of United States history would greatly benefit from the inclusion of the importance of textiles to the development of the social and economic landscapes.

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